Press release

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Severe weather costs the UK millions

3 April 2002

Severe gales, reaching 90 m.p.h. in late January, left thousands of homes and businesses in the UK without electricity, caused disruption to transport services and damage to buildings, and cost the UK £150 million, reveals recent research undertaken by the Met Office.

The Met Office has developed a postcode resolution 'Severe Weather Impacts Model', to predict the economic and social impact of severe weather on for example emergency services, businesses, transport systems and power supplies. It has calculated that the average annual damage in the UK due to severe weather is over £1 billion.

When severe weather strikes, the most we can do is be prepared as much as possible. The model demonstrates the financial benefits of being prepared, and predicts that cost savings could increase tenfold to £60 million per year. For example, local councils can plan for heavy snowfall by fixing snow ploughs to vehicles and putting staff on standby. Utility companies can improve response times in a crisis by bringing in extra manpower to an affected area before the bad weather strikes.

Stewart Wass, Head of Government Business, Met Office, says: "The model illustrates that severe weather can have a catastrophic effect economically and socially. It also indicates that with improved resources, such as a more detailed forecasting service and increased awareness and warning within our infrastructure services, the impact of severe weather can be reduced with millions of pounds saved."

Notes

The Severe Weather Impact Model determines the following: economic loss, loss avoided through mitigation, cost of mitigation, number of people affected, forecast value (based on benefit/cost and forecast accuracy, scale of damage and scale of disruption produced through the combination of the number of people and economic loss)

The Severe Weather Impacts Model researches impact of severe weather down to a resolution of postcode district - approximately 8000 households.

Provisional predictions on case studies such as the Folkestone Flood in August 1996 have been close to the reported impacts. The Severe Weather Impacts Model predicted 372 houses flooded in the Folkestone Flood in August 1996, 400 homes were actually reported to be affected.

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